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A

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF
HUGH WILLIAMSON, M. D. LL. D.

MEMBER OF THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, CORRESPONDING
SECRETARY OF THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW-YORK, MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSO-
PHICAL SOCIETY, OF THE HOLLAND SOCIETY OF
SCIENCES, OF THE SOCIETY OF ARTS AND
SCIENCES OF UTRECHT, &c. &c.



DELIVERED ON THE FIRST OF NOVEMBER, 1819,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



BY DAVID HOSACK, M. D. LL. D.

Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic in the University of New-
York, Fellow of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh,
Member of the Philosophical and Historical Societies
of New-York, Philadelphia, Boston, &c. &c.



NEW-YORK :

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1820.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

July 13th, 1819.

RESOLVED, That a Biographical Discourse, commemorative of the political character, and literary services of DOCTOR HUGH WILLIAMSON, late a member of this society, deceased, be delivered before the society, and that DOCTOR DAVID HOSACK be requested to perform the duty.

JOHN PINTARD, *Recording Secretary.*

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

November 9th, 1819.

RESOLVED, That the thanks of this society be presented to DOCTOR DAVID HOSACK, for his Biographical Memoir of our late respected member, HUGH WILLIAMSON L L. D., delivered before the Society on the first instant, and that he be respectfully requested to furnish a copy for publication.

RESOLVED, That *Colonel John Trumbull, Gulian C. Verplanck, Esq.*, and the *Rev. F. C. Schaeffer*, be a committee to wait on DOCTOR HOSACK with the preceding resolution.

JOHN PINTARD, *Recording Secretary.*

NOTICE.

It is proper for me in this place to acknowledge, that, in preparing the following di-course, in addition to those resources, which an uninterrupted friendship of twenty-five years, with the subject of this memoir, has furnished me, I have received many of the anecdotes and other circumstances relative to the earlier years and education of Dr. Williamson from his family and friends.

To his brother, Captain John Williamson, of Charleston, South Carolina—to his nephew, Mr. John Nevin, of Shippensburg, Pennsylvania—to the late President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson—to the Right Reverend Bishop White—to James Read, Esq. of Philadelphia, and to Mrs. Hall, daughter of the late Dr. Ewing, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, I am particularly indebted.

For several facts relative to the means of classical education afforded by the middle colonies anterior to the American revolution, I also acknowledge my obligations to “the Memoirs of the Life of the late Dr. Rittenhouse, by William Barton, Esq.” and to that learned and excellent history of literature and science in this country, entitled, a Brief Retrospect of the 18th Century, by the Rev. Samuel Miller, D. D. now Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in the Theological Seminary of Princeton College, New-Jersey.

D. H.

New-York, January 1, 1820.

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR.

GENTLEMEN,

Members of the Historical Society,

WE are assembled at this time to contemplate the character of our late distinguished member, Dr. HUGH WILLIAMSON, and to recount the services rendered to his country and to literature by that eminent philosopher and statesman. Upon no occasion, Gentlemen, could the resolution you have adopted, to commemorate the virtues and the wisdom of the more eminent and useful members of our institution, have been more appropriate, than that which you have selected; for if a life, devoted to patriotism—to professional services—to the cause of science—and to the constant performance of moral and religious duty, deserves our notice, and is worthy of a public

record, then it is meet that the name of Hugh Williamson be placed upon the column you propose to erect to the memory of the great and the good.

To you, young Gentlemen of the College of Physicians and Surgeons,* who are at this time convened for the prosecution of your medical studies, the subject of the discourse, now to be delivered, is full of interest and instruction. I have, accordingly, with the permission of the society, at whose request this exercise has been prepared, made choice of this day for the performance of the duty assigned me, that I may have an opportunity of exhibiting to you the portrait of virtue, science, and religion, blended, as they ever ought to be, in the character of an accomplished physician.

Dr. Williamson was a native of the state of Pennsylvania ; he was born on the 5th day of December, 1735, in West Nottingham township, near Octarara river, which divides Chester from Lancaster county. His parents were natives of Ireland, but their earlier ancestors, it is believed, came originally from Scotland.

* This discourse was delivered to the Historical Society, in the Hall of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, at the opening of the winter session, upon which occasion the students of medicine were also assembled

His father, John Williamson, was an industrious tradesman, who had pursued his business, that of a clothier, in the city of Dublin. He came to America, and settled in Chester county, about the year 1730.

The mother of Dr. Williamson, Mary Davison, was a native of Derry; with her father, George Davison, she came to this country, when a child about three years of age; on their way to America they were captured and plundered on the coast, by Theach, the noted pirate Blackbeard; upon being released they arrived in Philadelphia. She died about fifteen years since, having attained her 90th year. The parents of Dr. Williamson were married in the year 1731, shortly after his father's arrival in this country, and ten children, viz. six sons and four daughters, were the fruits of that connexion. Hugh was their eldest son.

His parents were both distinguished for their un-deviating integrity—their habits of industry and frugality—their great moral worth, and attention to the duties of religion.

In a very interesting letter which I received from the nephew of Dr. Williamson, Mr. John Nevin, conveying information from his venerable mother, the sister of the doctor, now residing in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, he observes:

“To the piety of her parents, my dear mother bears testimony with tears of joy; she has often heard, that when her father brought her mother home to his own house, a few days after marriage, the bride, only seventeen years of age, brought the bible and laid it down on the table beside him; he pushed it away—saying, ‘Pshaw, Mary, what nonsense;’ Mary wept;—but her husband soon comforted her, telling her he had only acted thus to test her sincerity; for he added, ‘let others do as they will, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’ And as he began, so he continued, morning and evening, to worship the God of heaven, calling together his family, apprentices, and servants.” “When he happened to be absent,” Mr. Nevin continues the narrative, “my grandmother conducted the devotional exercises in the family: indeed, recollecting the wholesome instructions given to me by this excellent woman, and the anxious desire which she manifested, that the duties of religion should be maintained in the families of her offspring, it is a pleasing task to me to bear record of her worth, her practical and exemplary piety, and that living faith which bore her triumphant through the gates of death.”

Of this parentage, Dr. Williamson was justly proud, believing with the Roman poet,

“ ——— nec census, nec clarum nomen avorum,
Sed probitas magnos, ingeniumque facit.”

Ovid. Epist.—Pont. I. 9. v. 39.

“ Nor ancestry nor honours of the state,
“ But *sense* and *virtue*, make a mortal great.”

His father, observing that Hugh was of a slender, delicate constitution, and that he was not likely to attain to that vigour that would enable him to support himself by manual labour, resolved to give him a liberal education. After having received the common preparatory instruction of a country school, near his father's house, he was sent at an early age to learn the languages at an academy established at New-London Cross Roads, under the direction of that very eminent scholar, the Rev. Francis Alison, justly entitled, from his talents, learning, and discipline, the *Busby* of the western hemisphere.

At that period, I may remark, the means of instruction in the middle colonies were confined to grammar schools or academies; for the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts,* the college of Wil-

* Established in 1638.

liam and Mary, in Virginia,* and of Yale College, in Connecticut,† were the only regularly organized establishments at that time in this country ; for neither in New-Jersey,‡ Pennsylvania,§ New-York,|| nor Maryland, had any public measures been taken for the promotion of literature : what was done was exclusively the result of individual exertion.

But although the colonies just mentioned did not enjoy the benefits of regularly organized *collegiate* institutions, yet they possessed in their academies and grammar schools, the most ample means of instruction in classical literature, and in most of the sciences constituting the usual education preparatory to the study of the learned professions.

The academies established on the Neshaminy, in the neighbourhood of Philadelphia, by the Rev. Mr. William Tennent and Mr. Roan ; the grammar school commenced by Mr. Grew, Mr. Annan, and Mr. Stevenson, in the city of Philadelphia ; the still more celebrated institution of the Rev. Dr. Alison,

* Established in 1690.

† do. do. 1701.

‡ College of New-Jersey, was established in 1746.

§ College of Philadelphia, in 1753.

|| King's, now Columbia, College, in 1754.

at New-London Cross Roads, Chèster County ; that of Fogs Manor, established by the Rev. Samuel Blair ; and that of West Nottingham, by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Finley, who was afterwards made President of the College of New-Jersey, have been the means of educating some of the most distinguished men that have adorned our country ; and in connexion with the elder collegiate institutions, of diffusing through our land a taste for letters, that is still assiduously cultivated, and the impulse of which must long be continued.

The names of the venerable Charles Thompson, the late Secretary of the American Congress ; the Rev. Dr. John Ewing, late Provost of the University of Pennsylvania ; Thomas M'Kean, the late Governor of that State ; Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the most distinguished physicians of his day ; the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers ; the Rev. Dr. Alexander M'Whorter ; and the Tennents, Gilbert, John, and William, among the most able and learned divines of our country ; with many other eminently useful men, who received their elementary education at the seminaries I have enumerated, compose a constellation which will ever reflect lustre upon the American character, and honour upon the teachers

from whom they received their first lessons in literature ; and, I may add, in virtue : for it was no less an object of their instructors, “to mend the heart,” than to improve the understanding.

Mr. Williamson enjoyed the advantages of being educated in one of the most celebrated of these institutions, then under the care of Dr. Alison, which academy, upon the removal of that gentleman to the station of Vice Provost and Professor of Moral Philosophy, in the College of Philadelphia, was afterwards transferred to Newark, in the State of Delaware, under the direction of his pupil, the Rev. Alexander M'Dowell.

In the school of Dr. Alison, and of his successor Mr. M'Dowell, Mr. Williamson remained until he had made great proficiency in all those branches of learning that were considered necessary for his admission into college.

In the prosecution of his studies, while at school, he distinguished himself by his diligence, his love of order, and his correct, moral, and religious deportment ; for, even at that early age, he had imbibed from his parents and instructors, a due sense of that “intimate connexion which subsists between letters and morality, between sensibility and taste, between

an improved mind and a virtuous heart.”* Accord-
ingly, under the impulse of these first impressions,
through life, he

“————— all his study bent
To worship God aright, and know his works.”

Milton's P. L. XI. 377.

Thus prepared under the care of his eminent teachers, he retired from the seminary of Dr. Alison, and, at his father's house, applied himself to the study of Euclid's Elements, of which, in a short time, he became master. I may here observe, that he discovered very early in life, a strong attachment to mathematical reasoning, and to that order and precision, which the science of mathematics impresses upon the mind: but his absolute want of a poetical talent was not less perceptible.

The father now proposed to send his son to Europe to finish his education that had been so successfully begun; but as a charter had been obtained for the academy in Philadelphia, about the time he was to have sailed, it was concluded that he should immediately

* Johnson.

proceed to that city. Accordingly, he entered in the first class in the College of Philadelphia, where he remained four years; and at the first commencement held in that college, on the 17th day of May, 1757, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts. It is an evidence of the talents, the industry, and of the success, with which Mr. Williamson prosecuted his collegiate studies, and of the high estimation in which he was held by the professors and trustees of the university, that during the time he passed at college, he was successively employed as a teacher, both in the Latin and English schools, connected with that institution. A little anterior to this period, his father and family had removed to Shippensburgh, Cumberland county. His father died in the same year that his son received his first degree.

Hugh was appointed his sole executor, and, upon the event of his father's death, took up his residence with his mother at Shippensburgh, where he remained about two years, during which period he, in a great degree, devoted himself to the settlement of his father's estate, personally collecting the debts that were due to it, and which were very much scattered. By the fatigue of body, in connexion with the distress of mind he experienced upon the death of his father, his constitution received a shock which

induced an alarming hypochondriasis, that was only relieved by travelling, and a release from the anxiety and care which his attention to business had imposed.

As has already been intimated, Mr. Williamson's mind was early impressed with a sense of religion. It is a remark of an excellent writer, who duly appreciates this union of the intellectual faculties with purity of moral character and conduct in life, "That knowledge only is of value which exalts the virtue, multiplies the comforts, soothes the sorrow, and improves the general felicity of human intercourse."* With Mr. Williamson, this sentiment was not a mere speculative opinion; it entered into the daily practice and pursuits of his life, and that love of truth and virtue which philosophy had taught him as a dignified sentiment, christianity consecrated as a religious duty. With this frame of mind, it was his original intention, and he considered it his duty, to prepare himself for the ministry, at the same time believing that occupation to be the most honourable and useful in which he could be engaged, and for which his piety and education had peculiarly quali-

* Wakefield.

fied him. "It was remarkable," says another communication which I have received from his family, "that before he entered upon the study of divinity, while yet quite a young man, he visited and prayed with the sick in the neighbourhood, and it was pleasing to the pious of those days to remark the fervency and devotion with which this young layman approached the throne of grace."

During the period of his residence with his mother, then a widow, he devoted all his time not occupied by the business of his father's estate, to the study of divinity, frequently visiting Dr. Samuel Finley, an eminent divine, already mentioned, who at that time preached at East Nottingham township, Chester county, and who then directed his pursuits. In 1759, Mr. Williamson went to Connecticut, where he still pursued his theological studies, and was licensed to preach the gospel. After his return from Connecticut, he was also admitted a member of the presbytery of Philadelphia. He preached but a short time, not exceeding two years, and then his preaching must have been only occasional; he never was ordained, or took charge of a congregation, for his health did not permit him to perform the stated duties of a pastor. The infirm state of his health in early life made it very questionable whether his lungs

would bear the exertions of public speaking: these apprehensions were now verified, for he became much troubled with pains and strictures of his chest, which led him to abandon the profession that was the first object of his choice, and to which he was, from a sense of duty, attached. The memorable controversy, too, which took place about that period in the Presbyterian church, between the adherents of Mr. Whitefield, and those who considered themselves as the old and more orthodox party,* also proved to him a source of great disgust, and, I am informed, had great influence in withdrawing him from his theological pursuits: he accordingly left the pulpit, and entered upon the study of medicine. To this science, it appears, he also had already manifested some predilection; his nephew remarks upon this subject, “my mother can give but little information respecting the doctor’s study of medicine; she however believes, that this science must have been a favourite study with him long before he had determined to attend to it regularly, as she found him, when studying divinity, giving directions respecting inoculation for the small-pox.”

* See Life of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers, by Dr. Miller.

In the year 1760, he received the degree of Master of Arts, in the College of Philadelphia, and was immediately after appointed the professor of mathematics in that institution.* He accepted the professorship, regarding it a most honourable appointment, but without any intention of neglecting his medical studies. It had been observed of him very early in life, that he had a strong natural fondness for mathematical investigation, and it was remarked, that while he was a student in college, all his public exercises and disputations partook so much of the mathematical form of reasoning, that he was considered by his fellow students as an adroit and obstinate antagonist. At the same time, as already hinted, it was equally observable that he had no talent for versification. I have often heard him remark, that the first part of a Spanish proverb implied a severe censure upon him, viz. that "he is a fool who *cannot* make one verse ; he is a fool who *will* make two."

On the 8th of October, 1763, as I am informed by my venerable friend, Bishop White, the President of the Board of Trustees of the University of Penn-

* Works of William Smith, D. D.

sylvania, Mr Williamson gave notice of his intended resignation of his professorship; and in 1764, he left his native country for Europe, for the purpose of prosecuting his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh.

He remained in that city, enjoying the advantages of instruction afforded by the lectures of the elder Monro, Whytte, Cullen, Home, Alston, and Dr. John Gregory, the author of the *Legacy*, and father of the present distinguished professor of the practice of physic in that celebrated seat of learning. During his stay in Edinburgh, Mr. Williamson was occasionally confined to his chamber or bed, by intermitting fevers and pains in the breast, so much so that he had nearly resolved to make a visit to Lisbon, or some other warm climate; but recovering from these complaints at the close of the lectures, he left Edinburgh, made a tour through the northern parts of Scotland, after which he proceeded to London, where he remained twelve months, diligently pursuing his studies, and, as at Edinburgh, by his zeal attracting the notice and kind attentions of his instructors. From London he crossed over to Holland, and proceeded to Utrecht, where he completed his medical education. Having passed the usual examination, in which he displayed his classical and

medical attainments, and having submitted to the professors of that University a Latin thesis, he obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine. He afterwards amused himself with a tour on the continent, from which he returned to his native country in a state of health considerably improved.

After his return, Dr. Williamson practised medicine in Philadelphia for some years with great success, as it respected the health of his patients, but with painful effects as it regarded his own. By the occasional loss of sleep, to which he was necessarily exposed, his constitution soon became considerably impaired, and so acute was his sensibility to the sufferings of the sick, that he seldom had a patient, in imminent danger, that he did not experience a febrile excitement of the system. He therefore resolved to abandon medicine, and to attempt the relief of his constitution by mercantile pursuits. Fortunately for the interests of science, and, I may add, for our country, this resolution was not carried into effect until some years after this period. In the meantime, Dr. Williamson remained in the city of Philadelphia, devoted to his favourite literary and philosophical investigations.

Shortly after this time, the attention of the philosophers, both of Europe and America, was directed to an event which was about to take place, of great

importance to astronomical science and to navigation : I refer to the transit of Venus over the sun's disk, which occurred on the third day of June, 1769, "a phenomenon which had never been seen but twice by any inhabitant of our earth, which would never be seen again by any person then living, and on which depended very important astronomical consequences."* This subject had already engaged the attention of the astronomers of the other hemisphere, and measures, preparatory to that event, had been adopted; for in the latter part of the year 1767, it had been resolved by the Royal Society of London, to send persons to the South Seas, as a part of the world peculiarly favourable for observing the expected transit.

This phenomenon, which presented to the American mathematicians and astronomers an ample occasion for the display of their abilities in these departments of science, as might be expected, attracted great attention in the colonies.

At a meeting of the American Philosophical Society, held on the 7th day of January, 1769, Dr. Hugh Williamson was appointed a member of a

* Rush's Eulogium on Dr. Rittenhouse.

committee, consisting of Mr. David Rittenhouse, the Rev. Dr. Ewing, Dr. Smith, provost of the college, Mr. Charles Thompson, and some others, eminently skilled in mathematics and astronomy, to observe that *rare phenomenon*, as it was aptly styled by Dr. Smith.

The contacts of the limbs of Venus and the sun, as observed and drawn up by Dr. Williamson, together with the determination of the sun's parallax and distance, as derived from those observations, are communicated to the world in the first volume of the 'Transactions of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia.

The observations published on that memorable occasion, by the Rev. Dr. Ewing, Mr. David Rittenhouse, the Rev. Dr. Smith, by Professor Winthrop, of Massachusetts, as well as those by Dr. Williamson, and other American astronomers, were considered by the philosophers of Europe, as highly creditable to their authors, and of great importance to the cause of science. By the astronomer royal, the Rev. Mr. Nevil Maskelyne, they were referred to with peculiar notice and approbation :

"I thank you," says that eminent philosopher to his correspondent, the Hon. Thomas Penn, "for the account of the Pennsylvania observations

of the transit, which seem *excellent* and *complete*, and do honour to the gentlemen who made them, and those who promoted the undertaking."

Soon after this event, the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, sensible of the correctness and ability with which the labours referred to had been conducted, and desirous of obtaining additional means of settling the longitude of Philadelphia, Norriton, and other places which had been the scites of their former observations of the transit of Venus, appointed the same committee, of which Dr. Williamson had been an active member, to observe the transit of Mercury, which was to take place on the 9th day of November of the same year. The observations of Dr. Williamson, with the elements of his calculation of that transit, are also contained in the same important volume of the *American Transactions*.

In the month of September, of the same momentous year, a considerable degree of public alarm was excited by the appearance of a remarkable comet. Its tail was of vast extent, subtending an arch of ten or fifteen degrees. Dr. Williamson, who had reflected much upon subjects of this nature, could not allow himself to believe that comets, more than other heavenly bodies, were destructive masses of fire. Having considered the subject with great attention, he

presented to the American Philosophical Society a theory which seems to have been perfectly new, and which he ever claimed as his own.

He alleged that the lucid tail of that comet, which must have been many millions of miles in length, was nothing else than the atmosphere of the comet thrown behind the nucleus as it approached the sun, and illuminated by the refracted rays of the sun's light. I have often heard him remark, that from night to night, with his telescope, he traced a spot immediately behind the nucleus in which there was not any observable light. Hence he inferred, that comets, instead of being infinitely hotter than melted iron, were, in all probability, like Jupiter and Saturn, habitable planets, and in their greatest and least distance from the sun might afford a comfortable residence for people, not materially differing from the inhabitants of this earth in the capacity of bearing cold or heat.

This idea of comets gives a prodigious extent to our ideas of the rational beings with which this solar system may be inhabited. It was not without considerable difficulty that the society could be prevailed upon to publish a theory of comets, so different from, and perfectly opposed to, the received opinions on that subject. But the doctor, after the

most rigid examination of his own views, and of the objections that were adduced, persisted in his determination to give them publicity, and it is well known that he always considered his theory of comets the most fortunate of all his conjectures on philosophical subjects. The paper he at that time published has lately been rewritten, and in an improved form has been again communicated to the public in the first volume of the Transactions of the Literary and Philosophical Society of New York. He concludes that interesting communication with the following exalted view of his subject :

“ Having ventured an opinion that every planet and every comet in our system is inhabited, we have only taken a very imperfect view of the astonishing works of the divine architect. There are about three thousand fixed stars visible by the naked eye. Every one of those stars is doubtless a sun, and each of those suns affords light and heat to another system of worlds. Let us only suppose that each of those suns illuminates as many orbs as belong to our system. We shall state the number at two hundred, though it is believed that twice this number of comets, beside the planets, have already been discovered. This would give three hundred thousand worlds. But three thousand is a small number when

compared with the whole number of stars that have been discovered. The relative places of fifty thousand stars have been determined by the help of telescopes. Fifty thousand solar systems, each containing at least one hundred worlds! Five millions of worlds all inhabited by rational beings! How do we seem to dwindle into littleness? How small, how few, are the ephemerons of this little globe, when compared with the countless myriads who inhabit five millions of worlds? All those worlds, and every one of their inhabitants, are under the constant care of the Divine Being. Not one of them is neglected. ‘Great and marvellous are his works: how terrible his power!’ ”

In the following year, (1770,) Dr. Williamson prepared and published, through the same channel of communication,* some observations upon the change of climate that had been remarked to take place more particularly in the middle colonies of North America.

The doctor had ascertained that within the last forty or fifty years, the winters had not been so intensely cold, nor the summers so disagreeably warm,

* Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, &c. vol. I. p. 336. 2d edition.

as they had been in the earlier settlement of the country ; and that during the same period a very observable change had also taken place in the character of the prevailing diseases ; that the fevers which had, for many years, maintained a fatal reign through many parts of this country, were then evidently on the decline, and that inflammatory fevers, with the several diseases of cold seasons, had been observed to remit their violence as the winters had become more temperate. To account for those facts was the object of that communication. The view taken of this subject—of the face and situation of the country—of the influence of prevailing winds—of the effects of clearing, and the subsequent cultivation of the soil, and the illustrations that were adduced from the history of the settlement of other parts of the world, and of their progress in agriculture and civilization, gave an interest to that paper that caused it to be extensively read and circulated. In Europe it received the most respectful notice, and greatly extended the name and fame of its author.

In a letter which I have lately received from Mr. Jefferson, whose accuracy of observation is only equalled by his extensive researches in literature and science, noticing that production of Dr. Williamson, he observes, “ the memoir in the *Philosophical Tran-*

sactions, on the change of climate in America, I have ever considered as a remarkably ingenious, sound, and satisfactory piece of philosophy." The publication of this interesting paper, with those which had preceded it, procured for Dr. Williamson, not only the notice of the various literary institutions of his native country, into which he was shortly after introduced as an honorary member, but they obtained for him abroad the most flattering distinctions. The Holland Society of Sciences—the Society of Arts and Sciences of Utrecht, conferred upon him, in the most honourable manner, a membership in those distinguished institutions; and about the same period he received from a foreign university, I believe from Leyden, as the further reward of his literary labours, the degree of Doctor of Laws.

I shall again advert to the subject of the last mentioned publication, when I may have occasion to notice the more elaborate observations of Dr. Williamson on climate, one of the works of his later years.

New scenes now opened upon his view: From some letters addressed by Dr. Williamson to his friend, the late Rev. Dr. Ewing, now in the possession of his family, it appears that in 1772, the Doctor made a voyage to the West India Islands, for the purpose of collecting subscriptions for the academy

of Newark, in the state of Delaware, of which institution he and Dr. Ewing were both trustees. "His stay in the islands, (says the sensible writer* of the communication with which I have been favoured,) seems to have been protracted by severe bilious fevers; from the effects of which, he almost despaired of recovering his former state of health; his zeal, however, in the cause of literature, was not abated, and finally he procured a handsome subscription; on his way home, he passed a short time in Charleston, where he received some liberal fees for medical advice."

Exceedingly anxious for the prosperity of the academy, while he was yet in the islands, he planned a tour through Great Britain for the benefit of that institution; his project was communicated to the trustees, and received their approbation: accordingly, in the autumn of 1773, Dr. Williamson, in conjunction with Dr. Ewing, afterwards Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, was appointed to make a tour through England, Scotland, and Ireland, to solicit further benefactions for the same academy of Newark.

* Mrs. Hall, of Philadelphia, daughter of the late Dr. Ewing.

Thus honourably associated, and the reputation they had acquired from their late astronomical observations having preceded them, they were received with great attention by the literati, and other men of influence in Great Britain : a circumstance in itself, highly favourable to the object of their mission. Their success, however, was but indifferent, owing to the irritation of the public mind against the colonies, which about that time was already considerable ; yet, their characters as men of learning procured them much personal attention, and some money.

The constant hope of accommodation with the colonies, and the example of the King, from whom they received a liberal donation, notwithstanding his great displeasure towards his American subjects, encouraged them to persevere in the business of their mission until the autumn of 1775. Hostilities having then commenced, Dr. Ewing returned to America, leaving Dr. Williamson in London, who determined to remain, and to make some further efforts for the establishment of his favourite academy.—But I must return to some circumstances of importance which here claim our notice.

The vessel in which Dr. Williamson had engaged passage for Europe, lay in the harbour of Boston,

to which place he had proceeded, and was waiting for her sailing at the very time at which that remarkable circumstance took place, the destruction of the tea of the East India Company.* Upon Dr. Williamson's arrival in England, he was the first to report to the British Government that occurrence; and, after a private interview with Lord Dartmouth, was examined on the subject before his Majesty's Privy Council: that examination took place on the 19th of February, 1774. On that occasion, Dr. Williamson ventured to declare, that, if the coercive measures of Parliament were persisted in, nothing less than a civil war would be the result. Time soon

* According to the regulations of the Custom-House at Boston, every vessel, not entered within twenty days after her arrival, was liable to seizure by the government vessels then in the harbour.—As respected the Tea ships, the inhabitants of Boston waited nineteen days; during which period they daily solicited of the governor a permit, that those vessels with their tea might return to the ports whence they had come. This request was peremptorily refused. On the evening of the *nineteenth* day, between the hours of *seven* and *twelve* o'clock, the time at which it would have been seizable by government, the tea was destroyed by a party of Americans. For many particulars relative to this affair, I am indebted to a gentleman, now in my hearing, (General Ebenezer Stevens,) who was one of those concerned in the act of destroying the tea, and who bore a conspicuous part in the subsequent events of the Revolution.—See also *Almon's Remembrancer*, vol. 1. *Collection of the Mass. Histor. Society*, vol. 2.

verified his prediction ; but the want of correct information on the part of the British ministry, as to the state of public feeling in this country, seems almost incredible. Lord North himself has been heard to declare, that Dr. Williamson was the first person who, in his hearing, had even intimated the probability of such an event.*

* While Dr. Williamson was at Boston, he became acquainted with Messrs. Adams, Warren, Otis, and other selectmen. From Boston he sailed for London, on the 22nd of December, 1773, in a ship that belonged to Mr. Hancock, a few days after the tea was destroyed. Governor Hutchinson had sent his despatches by a brig that sailed some days before the ship. She belonged to a man of other politics. In that brig sailed three gentlemen passengers. The ship arrived six days before the brig. In the mean time, Dr. Williamson, in conversation with Lord Dartmouth, had detailed the events at Boston. The three gentlemen who arrived in the brig, were immediately examined, and their evidence, signed and sworn to before the Privy Council, was afterwards communicated to Parliament. Dr. Williamson being sent for, was at first examined before two or three public officers, about the 1st of February, 1774, preparatory to his being examined before the Privy Council. From the several questions that had been put to him, and the direct answers, he concluded that no satisfactory knowledge could be acquired of the late incidents in Boston : therefore, when he returned to his lodging, he wrote a regular detail of the several material incidents he had observed in Boston, which included an answer to the several questions that had been put to him, and a statement of sundry facts. When he attended the next day at the Horse-Guards, where the Privy Council sat, an officer read to him what had been written as his answer to the questions that had been propounded. He objected to the whole as incorrect, and

We now come to an event, memorable by the commotion it excited at the time, and by the magnitude of the consequences which have since arisen

handed him the narrative he had written. After that officer had informed the council of the Doctor's objections to the answers as written, the Doctor was called in, and the Lord President informed him, that they would receive his narrative, but wished to ask him a few more questions. The clerk wrote his answer to one of the questions so very incorrectly, as to convey an idea very different from what was intended—of this the Doctor complained, and the clerk was properly reprimanded. When the examination was finished, an officer, the Attorney General, handed the Doctor a book, and a pen, that he might swear and sign his name. He laid down the pen—requesting their lordships to believe that he was not in the habit of saying things that he was not willing to swear—But although he had studied medicine, and not law, he knew so much of the law as that a witness should not be examined concerning any fact that might endanger a man's life, unless the party was present by whom he might be interrogated. This, he said, was counted to be the law in England; he could not tell whether it would pass for law in America: "*But if the measures were about to be pursued by Parliament against America, which out of doors were said to be intended, the time was not far distant, when his native country would be deluged with blood.*" "*This hand,*" said he, "*shall be guiltless of that blood.*" The Lord Chancellor assured him that the examination and oath now taken, could not be used against any man who might be prosecuted, and tried for life; and the president declared upon his honour that it had been the custom, time out of mind, to examine witnesses upon oath before the Privy Council, consequently this could not be considered as setting a novel precedent. Dr. Williamson then subscribed the narrative. The examinations of the other three gentlemen were communicated to Parliament, but Dr. W. understood that his examination had not been communicated, nor could he think of any

from it ; I refer to the discovery of the celebrated Letters of Hutchinson and Oliver : and here I beg leave to call your notice to a few of the earlier circumstances of the late revolutionary war, in order to communicate a fact hitherto unrevealed.

reason why it should have been suppressed, unless that he had observed in the course of his narrative, that the selectmen in Boston caused a guard to be placed over the Tea ships, for the double purpose, as they alleged, of preventing the tea from being smuggled on shore, and of preventing evil minded persons from destroying the ships or tea ; for they had determined that both should return to London. As that fact seemed to invalidate the charge of the premeditated intention of the selectmen to destroy the tea, which charge, however, was of great use to the administration in their desire to cripple the town of Boston, it may have caused the suppression of his evidence.*

It is a remarkable circumstance, that neither Governor Hutchinson, of Massachusetts, nor any other man in the service of the governor, should have had the candour to intimate to the Prime Minister, that resistance might be the effect of severe measures.

In October, 1776, Lord North, having sent for Mr. Ralph Izard, then in London, and Dr. Williamson, to ask their opinion concerning the operation of a particular law, told the Doctor that he, in presence of the Privy Council, was the first person that ever had intimated, in his hearing, the probability of a civil war in America.

The particular facts contained in this note, were communicated to the writer by Dr. Williamson, a short time before his decease.

* The author of this memoir is in possession of the original draft of Dr. Williamson's narrative communicated to the Privy Council.

Although the disturbances which originated in the famous stamp act, had nearly subsided with the repeal of that noxious measure, and returning sentiments of friendship were every day becoming more manifest, yet new obstacles to a permanent reconciliation appeared in the attempts of the British administration, to render certain officers of the provincial governments dependant on the crown alone. This measure of the court gave particular offence to the colony of Massachusetts, from the peculiarly obnoxious character of their governor, who at times impelled by avarice and by the love of dominion, had, in furtherance of his schemes of self aggrandisement, uniformly manifested the most determined support to the views and measures of the mother country.

However discreditable to his reputation it may be, certain it is, that Governor Hutchinson was secretly labouring to subvert the chartered rights of the colony, whose interests he had sworn to protect. His agency in procuring the passage of the stamp act was more than suspected, and apparently upon reasonable grounds.

The illustrious Franklin, who had recently rendered himself conspicuous by his examination before a committee of the British Privy Council, and

who at this period resided in London, as agent for the colonies of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, obtained possession, through the agency of a *third* person, of certain letters written by Governor Hutchinson; Secretary Oliver, afterwards Lieutenant Governor; Charles Paxton, esq., and other servants of the crown; and sent by them from Boston to Thomas Whately, esq., Member of Parliament, and a Private Secretary of Lord Grenville.

In these letters, the character of the people of Massachusetts was painted in the most odious colours, and their grievances and proceedings misrepresented by falsehoods the most glaring and unfounded.

It would seem to have been equally the object of Governor Hutchinson, and his coadjutors, to furnish excuses for the ministry, already sufficiently disposed to adopt every measure of severity towards the colonists, through the prejudiced representations of Bernard and his commissioners; and to poison the minds of the opposition, who had, on most occasions, proved themselves their warm advocates.

Dr. Franklin lost no time in transmitting these letters to his constituents at Boston. "The indignation and animosity which were excited, on their perusal, knew no bounds. The House of Representatives agreed on a petition, and remonstrance, to

his Majesty, in which they charged their Governor and Lieutenant Governor with being betrayers of their trust, and of the people they governed ; and of giving private, partial, and false information. They also declared them enemies to the colonies, and prayed for justice against them, and for their speedy removal from their places.”*

The petition and the remonstrance of the people of Massachusetts were communicated to his Majesty's Privy Council by Dr. Franklin, in person, and after a hearing by that board, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor were acquitted. It was on this occasion that Mr. Wedderburn, (afterwards Lord Loughborough,) who was employed as counsel on the part of the governor, pronounced his famous philippic against Dr. Franklin ; which has always been considered among the most finished specimens of oratory in the English language. In this speech, he charged that venerable character with having procured the letters by unfair means. “The letters could not have come to Dr. Franklin, (says Mr. Wedderburn,) by *fair means*—the writers did not give them to *him*, nor yet did the deceased corres-

* Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Franklin, 4to. p. 183. Lond. ed. 1818

pondent, [Mr. Whately,] who, from our intimacy, would have told me of it ; nothing then will acquit Dr. Franklin of the charge of obtaining them by fraudulent or corrupt means, for the most malignant of purposes ; unless he stole them from the person who stole them. This argument is irrefragable.

“I hope, my lords, you will mark and brand the man, for the honour of this country, of Europe, and of mankind. Private correspondence has hitherto been held sacred in times of the greatest party rage ; not only in politics but religion.” “He has forfeited all the respect of societies and of men. Into what companies will he hereafter go with an unembarrassed face, or the honest intrepidity of virtue ? Men will watch him with a jealous eye—they will hide their papers from him, and lock up their escrutoires. He will henceforth esteem it a libel to be called a *man of letters*, HOMO TRIUM LITERARUM.”*

A controversy having taken place in the public prints, between Mr. William Whately, (the brother of the secretary to whom the letters had been ad-

* Memoirs of Franklin, 4to. vol. 1. Appendix. See also the letters of Governor Hutchinson, and Lieutenant Governor Oliver, &c., and remarks thereon, by Israel Mauduit, with the Assembly's address, &c., 2nd ed. Lond. 1774.

dressed, and who was now dead,) and Mr., afterwards Sir John Temple, arising out of the manner in which the letters of Governor Hutchinson had been procured and transmitted to Boston, and which dispute was followed by a duel between those two gentlemen, Dr. Franklin, in order to prevent any further mischief, published a letter in the newspapers, in which he assumed the entire responsibility of sending the papers to America. Alluding to this letter of Dr. Franklin, Mr. Wedderburn continued :

“ But he not only took away the letters from one brother, but kept himself concealed till he had nearly occasioned the murder of the other. It is impossible to read his account, expressive of the coolest and most deliberate malice, without horror. Amid these tragical events, of one person nearly murdered, of another answerable for the issue ; of a worthy governor hurt in his dearest interest ; the fate of America is in suspense. Here is a man, who with the utmost insensibility of remorse, stands up and avows himself the author of all : I can compare it only to Zanga, in Dr. Young’s *Revenge*—

‘ Know then ’twas I——

I forged the letter—I disposed the picture—

I hated—I despised—and I destroy.—’

“I ask, my lords, whether the revengeful temper, attributed by poetic fiction only to the bloody African, is not surpassed by the *coolness* and *apathy* of the wily American.”

The speeches of Mr. Dunning, afterwards Lord Ashburton, and Mr. Lee, who appeared as council in behalf of the assembly of Massachusetts, were never reported at length; but they chiefly insisted upon the noxious parts of the letters of Hutchinson and Oliver.

By the preceding extracts from the speech of Mr. Wedderburn, it will be seen that the chief subject of his vehement invective was the disclosure, by Dr. Franklin, of what was termed by the Parliamentary orator, a private correspondence.* But the truth is,

* Dr. Priestley, who was present when Lord Loughborough pronounced his violent invective against Dr. Franklin, before the Privy Council, has published an interesting letter respecting Dr. Franklin's behaviour on that occasion. It is well worth a perusal, and may be found in the London Monthly Magazine, for 1804, and also in Priestley's Memoirs, and in the Memoirs and Life of Franklin, vol. 1. In a biographical work of some pretensions, the author, in his strictures on the character and services of Lord Loughborough, thus expresses himself: “His celebrated philippic pronounced against Dr. Franklin, before the Privy Council, is not perhaps surpassed by those of Demosthenes against Philip, or Cicero against Anthony.”

these letters could not be considered in any wise as private ; but were as public as letters could be. To use the emphatic language of Dr. Franklin himself,

I am constrained to enlarge this note by inserting the words of an American writer, (Mr. Walsh,) whose just sentiments are enlanced by the elegant and classic language in which they are conveyed.

“The discussion of the merits of the petition before the Privy Council, took place on the 29th of January, 1774; Franklin was present, accompanied by some few friends, and the lawyers employed for the colony. Mr. Wedderburn, the Solicitor General of the Crown, appeared as counsel for Hutchinson and his accomplices ; or, rather, as the gladiator of the ministers, who had fixed upon this occasion for the prostration of the American advocate, and had assembled a number of their friends to witness the edifying spectacle. Wedderburn gave himself little trouble about vindicating his nominal clients, but assailed the intended victim with the most opprobrious charges, and the most vehement invective. He held him forth as ‘a thief and a murderer ;’ as ‘having forfeited all the respect of societies and of men.’ As he alternated his abuse with humorous sarcasms, the members of the council universally laughed aloud, and the retainers of the ministry joined in the chorus. Franklin betrayed not the least emotion ; he saw and heard with calm dignity ; he only remarked to one of his lawyers, after the predetermined absolution of the culprits, that he was sincerely sorry to observe the lords of council behave so indecently, and to find ‘that the coarsest language could be grateful to the politest ear.’ This scene is one which calls for national commemoration, by the pencil of a Trumbull. It overwhelms us with astonishment, when we reflect that the proper question for consideration, was no other than the solemn complaint and prayer of an important province ; that the man thus treated was the representative of that, and three other considerable provinces ; the boast and idol of all the colonies, then in a state of fearful incalcescence ; venerable for his age, his genius, his discoveries and writings as a philosopher and a moralist ;

“They were not of the nature of private letters between friends ; they were written by public officers to persons in public stations, on public affairs, and intended to procure public measures : they were therefore handed to other public persons who might be influenced by them to produce those measures. Their tendency was to incense the mother country against her colonies, and by the steps recommended, to widen the breach, which they effected. The chief caution expressed with regard to privacy was, to keep their contents from the colony agents, who, the writers apprehended, might return them, or copies of them, to America. That apprehension was, it seems, well founded ; for the first agent who laid his hands on them thought it his duty to transmit them to his constituents.”* In a letter on this subject, addressed to a friend, he also observes : “On this occasion I

one whom all Europe besides was emulously seeking to honour ; and of whom the exalted countryman of Wedderburn, Lord Kames, wrote not long after in his *Sketches of the History of Man*. ‘Dr. Franklin, of Philadelphia, a man who makes a great figure in the learned world, and who would make a still greater figure for benevolence and candour, were virtue as much regarded in this declining age as knowledge.’” *Delaplaine’s Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans*, vol. 2.

* Franklin’s Letter to the printer of the *Daily Advertiser*.

think fit to acquaint you, that there has lately fallen into my hands, part of a correspondence, that I have reason to believe laid the foundation of most, if not all, of our present grievances. I am not at liberty to tell through *what channel* I received it; and I have engaged that it shall not be printed, nor any copies taken of the whole, or any part of it; but I am allowed to let it be seen by some men of worth in the province, for their satisfaction only. In confidence of your preserving inviolably my engagement, I send you enclosed the original letters, to obviate every pretence of unfairness in copying, interpolation, or omission.”*

Thus, Dr. Franklin performed a service which his situation as a public agent required of him. But notwithstanding the secrecy with which it had been conducted, the letters were soon after published by the assembly of Massachusetts; not however until after the appearance of other copies in Boston, produced by a member who, it was reported, had just received them from England.

I must be permitted to make an extract on this subject, from a writer to whom the literature of this

* Memoirs, 4to. p. 191.

country is largely indebted, and whom I have just quoted.

“ The celebrated affair of Oliver and Hutchinson’s letters, which occurred in December, 1772, exemplified the complete predominance in the mind of Franklin, of love of country, and the sense of official duty, over every suggestion of a temporising prudence, and every consideration of personal advantage. When accident put into his hands the libellous and treacherous letters of the governor, lieutenant governor, and other royal servants at Boston, it was enough for him to believe that they ought to be communicated to those whom they particularly concerned, to fulfil the obligation at once, fearlessly committing the ulterior results to Providence. He took, however, in pursuance of the high motives upon which he acted, every precaution in his power against sinister consequences. He kept inviolably, to the end of his life, under a severe trial of fortitude, the engagement of secrecy which he had contracted, as to the names of the individuals from whom he had received the letters ; but though he foresaw a tempest of obloquy, he did not hesitate a moment to disclose in the most public manner, his own share in the transaction as soon as he knew the disclosure

to be necessary for the prevention of mischief to an individual erroneously implicated.”* I may add, that in order to prevent any violation of his engagement to the person from whom he had received the letters, which the interrogatories of the court might have compelled, he thought it incumbent on him to return to America.†

* Delaplaine's Repository, vol. 2.

† “When Dr. Franklin put in his answer to the bill in Chancery, which had been filed against him in the name of Mr. Whately, he demurred to two of the interrogatories which it contained, and by which he was required to name the person from whom he had here received the letters in question, and also the person in America to whom they had by him been transmitted ; and declined making any disclosure of their names. This demurrer was, however, overruled, and he was ordered to answer these interrogatories ; but feeling that his doing so would be a violation of his engagement to the person from whom he had received the letters, and probably injurious to the person to whom they had been sent, he thought it incumbent on him to return to America, and thereby avoid the breach of his engagement ; and he appears to have done this conscientiously, and so completely, that the person from whom the letters were received was never ascertained ; nor were any of the conjectures respecting that person founded upon, or suggested by, any infidelity or indiscretion on the part of Dr. Franklin. He was not, however, under an equal obligation to secrecy in regard to the person to whom the letters were *immediately* transmitted ; and he therefore confidentially informed a friend of his, (Dr. Bancroft, to whom the editor is indebted for this note,) that they had been sent to Mr. Cushing, then speaker of the House of Representatives of the Massachusetts Bay, with whom it was Dr. Franklin's duty, as agent for the assembly of that province, to correspond.” See page 195 of Franklin's Memoirs, as published by William Temple Franklin, esq. London, 4to.

But it is time that I should declare to you, that this *third person* from whom Dr. Franklin received these famous letters, (and permit me to add that this is the first time the fact has been publicly disclosed,) was Dr. HUGH WILLIAMSON.

I have before stated his mission in behalf of the academy. Dr. Williamson had now arrived in London. Feeling a lively interest in the momentous questions then agitated, and suspecting that a clandestine correspondence, hostile to the interest of the colonies, was carried on between Hutchinson and certain leading members of the British Cabinet, he determined to ascertain the truth by a bold experiment.

He had learned that Governor Hutchinson's letters were deposited in an office different from that in which they ought regularly to have been placed; and having understood that there was little exactness in the transaction of the business of that office; (it is believed it was the office of a particular department of the treasury;) he immediately repaired to it, and addressed himself to the chief clerk, not finding the principal within: assuming the demeanour of official importance, he peremptorily stated that he had come for the last letters that had been received from Governor Hutchinson and Mr. Oliver, noticing the office in which they ought regularly to have been

placed. Without a question being asked, the letters were delivered. The clerk, doubtless, supposed him to be an authorized person from some other public office. Dr. Williamson immediately carried them to Doctor Franklin, and the next day left London for Holland.

I received this important fact from a gentleman of high respectability, now living ; with whom, as the companion and friend of his early days, Dr. Williamson had entrusted the secret.

By this daring measure, was detected and put beyond question, the misrepresentations and designs of Hutchinson and his associates ; and, perhaps, no event in the previous history of the provinces excited more bitter indignation, or was calculated to call for opposition to the measures of Great Britain, to which these misrepresentations had given rise.

The lively interest, and the conspicuous part which Dr. Williamson took in public affairs, did not prevent him, while in England, from bestowing a portion of his attention upon scientific pursuits. Electricity, whose laws had been recently determined by the discoveries of Dr. Franklin, and by his genius introduced among the sciences, was then a study, which, like chemistry at the present day, largely engrossed the minds of philosophers. In

conjunction with Dr. Ingenhousz, Mr. Walsh, Mr. John Hunter, and Dr. Franklin, he frequently instituted electrical experiments, to which I have often heard him refer with juvenile feelings, at the same time professing his ardent attachment to this branch of knowledge. The only paper which bears testimony to his investigations on this subject is that entitled "Experiments and Observations on the *Gymnotus Electricus*, or Electrical Eel," which was first published in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, for the year 1775, and has since been reprinted in the abridgment of that work.* Like the experiments of Mr. Walsh, those of Dr. Williamson led to a belief that the shock given by the *gymnotus electricus*, was truly an electrical phenomenon. The following are the results derived from the experiments which Dr. Williamson instituted on that occasion :

" 1st. That the Guiana Eel has the power of communicating a painful sensation to animals that touch or come near it. 2nd. That this effect depends entirely on the will of the eel ; that it has the power of giving a small shock, a severe one, or none

* *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, abridged by Hutton, Shaw, and Pearson, vol. xiii. page 597.

at all, just as circumstances may require. 3rd. That the shock given, or the principal sensation communicated, depends not on the muscular action of the eel, since it shocks bodies in certain situations at a great distance; and since particular substances only will convey the shock, while others, equally elastic or hard, refuse to convey it. 4th. That the shock must therefore depend on some fluid which the eel discharges from its body. 5th. That as the fluid discharged by the eel affects the same parts of the human body that are affected by the electric fluid; as it excites sensations perfectly similar; as it kills or stuns animals in the same manner; as it is conveyed by the same bodies that convey the electric fluid, and refuses to be conveyed by other bodies that refuse to convey the electric fluid; it must also be the true electrical fluid; and the shock given by this eel must be the true electrical shock." Finally, from these and sundry other experiments, Dr. Williamson was also led to believe, "that the gymnotus has powers superior to, or rather different from, those of the torpedo, or electric ray." Time will not allow me to point out in what respects the conclusions of Dr. Williamson, as deduced from his own investigations, coincide with, or differ from, those subsequently made on the same animal, by Baron Humboldt.*

* See his Personal Narrative, vol. 4.

Dr. Williamson had scarcely made his tour through Holland and the Low Countries, when the news of the declaration of American Independence reached him. He now concluded to return to his native land. He proceeded to France, and after a short time spent in that kingdom, during a great part of which he was confined by sickness, he sailed from Nantz in December, for Philadelphia, at which place he did not arrive before the 15th of March. The ship in which he sailed was captured off the Capes of Delaware, but he, with another passenger, escaped in an open boat with some very important public despatches, of which Dr. Williamson was the bearer.

The American army, at the period of Dr. Williamson's return from Europe, was, in some measure, organized, and every office in the Medical Staff, or in the line, that he could with any propriety accept, was filled up. True it was, that he had strong claims to public employment, and the proofs were in his possession; but those claims he could not at that time urge, without endangering individuals who were on the other side of the Atlantic, nor could he do it without a breach of confidence, a species of crime that he cordially abhorred. He resolved, therefore, to remain in private life, waiting for opportunities which he trusted would present them-

selves in the course of a dangerous struggle. In the mean time, he undertook a journey to Charleston in South Carolina, with a younger brother,* on a mercantile speculation. His brother sailed from Charleston for a neutral port in the West Indies. The Doctor, in company with another gentleman, purchased a sloop in Charleston, and having loaded her with a suitable cargo intended for Baltimore, ordered her for Edenton in North Carolina ; but before his arrival at Edenton, General Howe, with the British army, on his way to Philadelphia, had entered Chesapeake Bay. That circumstance determined the Doctor to continue in Edenton, from which he afterwards traded to neutral islands in the West Indies ; but while he thus continued his mercantile connexion with his brother, then also engaged in the West India trade, he determined to resume the practice of medicine : this he did with the same success as he had done formerly at Philadelphia, and in a short time acquired the confidence of the people of Edenton.

During the period of his residence there, he was invited to Newbern for the purpose of communicating the small-pox to such as had not experienced the benefits of inoculation. These circumstances in part contributed to spread the name of Dr. William-

* Captain John Williamson.

son, and to lay the foundation of that fame and confidence which he afterwards obtained in the State of North Carolina.

The Doctor had taken an early opportunity of informing the governor of that province, that if any circumstance should occur in the course of the war, in which he could be of use to the state, he might immediately command his services. It is known that the British troops took possession of Charleston in the winter of 1779-1780, and that the assembly of North Carolina ordered a large draft to be made from their militia, of from four to six thousand men, who should join the regular troops then ordered for the relief of South Carolina. The command of the North Carolina militia was given to their late Governor Caswell, with the rank of Major General. The General putting Dr. Williamson in mind of a former promise, handed him a commission, by which he found himself at the head of the medical department, as physician and surgeon.

An occasion now presented itself, in which the doctor had an opportunity of displaying his firmness of character, his humanity, his professional skill, and his incorruptible adherence to the cause in which he had embarked. On the morning after the battle near Camden, on the 18th of August, 1780, which the Doctor

witnessed, he fell in with Gen. Caswell, and requested of him to give him a flag, observing that, although a great part of the militia had behaved ill, yet many of them, as he must have observed, fought with distinguished bravery, and that a considerable number, in consequence, were wounded and made prisoners. They claimed our attention. The General advised him to send in some of the regimental surgeons, observing that his duty did not require that service from him. The Doctor replied, that the regimental surgeons, such of them as he had seen, refused to go ; being, as he suspected, afraid of the consequences. But, said he, if I have lived until a flag will not protect me, I have outlived my country ; and, in that case, have lived one day too long. To this observation, no reply was made—he obtained a pass, and the necessary instructions.

He remained two months with the enemy in Camden, during which time he rendered very essential services to the prisoners committed to his care. Such, too, was the estimation in which the medical skill of Dr. Williamson was held by the enemy, that during the illness of one of their general officers, in which the advice of a physician became necessary, his attendance was requested in addition

to that of the surgeons constituting their medical department.

About the middle of October, cold mornings and evenings proved injurious to convalescents who had no warm clothing. It now became desirable that some coarse woollens should be obtained. The Doctor, who had brought with him a small supply of gold to obviate accidents, availed himself of that cash to purchase the clothing that became necessary for the prisoners under his charge.

The British troops, in the autumn of 1780, took possession of Portsmouth and Norfolk, and made an incursion into North Carolina; a camp was directed to be formed near the Great Dismal, for the defence of the state. General Gregory, who had distinguished himself in the action near Camden, having been twice wounded with a bayonet while bringing off his brigade, was appointed to the command in that department; and at his particular request, Dr. Williamson was permitted to serve with him. This was a pleasing circumstance to the Doctor, for as a winter campaign was expected, he wished to have an opportunity of ascertaining, by actual observation, how far careful attention to the diet, dress, and comfortable lodging, might contribute to

preserve the health and lives of soldiers in their encampment.

The General made choice of a strong position within the borders of Virginia, about ten miles from the British advanced post, and orders were issued that the Doctor's instructions should be respected in every thing that might contribute to the comfort and health of the troops. A tent or hut of sufficient size to lodge twelve or fourteen men was immediately directed to be built on dry sandy ground. Dr. Williamson attended in person, and superintended the position of every piece of timber entering into its construction, and even overlooked the formation of the several drains leading from it. That hut became the general model for such as were afterwards erected, and the Doctor selected the ground on which all others were to be constructed. To the diet of the soldiers his attention was also particularly directed; believing that fluid nourishments, by their effects in promoting perspiration and preserving a healthy state of the excretions in general, are better calculated to guard the body against febrile diseases, he made it a subject of his care to provide the troops with a plentiful supply of soups and other liquid nourishments: for this purpose, while the soldiers remained on that ground, he directed that each mess, consisting gene-

rally of eight or ten persons, should detach a man from day to day, whose particular duty it was made to collect the various esculent vegetables that could be obtained in that neighbourhood ; the Doctor even took the direction of the manner in which their nourishment should be prepared.

There is much reason to believe that two thirds of the complaints by which military men suffer, originate in the circumstance of sleeping too near the moist ground, by which the perspiration is checked or moisture is absorbed, that, in most cases, is charged with putrescent vegetable matter. The Doctor was fully impressed with this truth ; and accordingly adopted the means of securing to his men a dry and comfortable lodging. As many trees in that country are loaded with moss, (the *Tillandsia Usneoides* of Linnæus,) he directed that every man should sleep on a bed of that moss, or of dried leaves, so as to afford perfect security again any moisture that might arise from the soil.

The sick and wounded were lodged in close and warm houses. They were also plentifully supplied with the tea prepared from the leaves of the Yapon, or *Ilex Cassine Peragua*, *Linn.* a plant which flourishes on the banks of Carolina, affords an excellent beverage, and is employed by many as a substitute for

the teas of China. When the use of milk was indicated, that article was also provided for the sick, and at the Doctor's expense. This experiment exceeded his most sanguine expectations ; for although they were in camp during the winter, never less of the North Carolina militia than five hundred, and on some occasions, including the addition of the Virginia militia, the number amounted to twelve ~~thousand~~ ^{hundred} men, they lost but two during the period of six months ; nor did any man obtain a furlough on account of indisposition.

Early in the spring of 1782, Dr. Williamson took his seat as a representative of Edenton, in the House of Commons of North Carolina. In that assembly he fortunately met with several members, whose brothers, sons, or other connexions, he had served in the army, or while they were prisoners. Those services were not forgotten. It was to be expected that a gentleman who had seen much of the world, and whose education had been so extensive, could hardly fail, with the aid of moderate oratorical abilities, to become an influential member in a deliberative body. Such in fact he proved. Among other bills which he introduced with success, we find one for erecting a court of chancery, which had often been attempted, in vain, in that state. It may be presumed, that old members, who had been accustomed to conduct the business of that

house, were not gratified with being left in the minority by a gentleman who was, at that time, comparatively a stranger in their state. Yet when the election came on for members of congress, those very gentlemen added their influence to that of the friends he had acquired in the army, and he immediately was sent to the general congress without opposition. He continued at the head of the delegation for three years, the longest time that any member was then permitted to serve.

During the three years in which he was not eligible to hold a seat in that body, he served the state occasionally in its legislature, or in some other capacity.

In the year 1786, he was one of the few members who were sent to Annapolis, to revise and amend the constitution of the United States; and who, finding that they had not sufficient powers to do any thing effectual, recommended to the several states to make another choice of delegates, and to invest them with the requisite powers. In that year Dr. Williamson published a series of Essays, deprecating paper currency, and recommending an excise to be imposed. In the year 1787, he was one of the delegates from North Carolina, in the general convention at Philadelphia,

who formed and signed the present constitution of the United States.

As the state of North Carolina had at that time in circulation, two large emissions of paper money, which were a legal tender, and which had depreciated to less than half of its nominal value, we are not surprised that a majority of its citizens should have looked on the federal constitution with an evil eye; for debtors, as we presume, in most countries form the majority. It followed that the Doctor, who advocated the new constitution with great zeal as well as ability; lost a portion of his popularity in the state he had represented: he was nevertheless again chosen in December, 1787, by the general assembly, to take his seat in congress the succeeding spring, when he would be again eligible, having been three years absent from that body. The assembly at the same time passed a law for a general state convention, to be held at Hillsborough, in July, 1788, for the purpose of determining upon the constitution that had been proposed. The convention, after much debate, adjourned on the 2d of August, having refused to adopt the proposed constitution by a majority of more than two to one, viz. one hundred and eighty-four to eighty-four.

The next general assembly, in December, 1788, passed a law calling another convention, to meet in

the following year. It may be recollected, that eleven of the states having adopted the new constitution, it was immediately after carried into operation, and the first congress met in New-York, in the year 1789. It happened a short time after that congress met, of which Dr. Williamson was a member, several small vessels laden with naval stores arrived from North Carolina at the port of New-York. The Collector of the customs refused them entrance, unless they should pay the alien duty, which was six to one of the domestic. Dr. Williamson, who continued in New-York, after the dissolution of the old congress, as a commissioner to settle the accounts of North Carolina with the United States, drew up and presented to congress a spirited protest against the decision of the Collector; at the same time urging the fact, that North Carolina had not by any act forfeited her claim to be considered as one of the United States. This protest, in twenty-four hours, produced a law, by which the Carolina vessels were allowed to enter upon paying the *domestic* tonnage. By that interposition and attention to the interests of North Carolina, the Doctor more than regained his former popularity. When the first convention sat, he was attending in congress; but he was chosen, and attended as a member of the second convention in 1789, by which

the constitution was adopted by a majority of two to one. The Doctor's congressional career was now to terminate. He had been chosen a representative from North Carolina, in the first and second congress; but desirous of retiring from political life, he at a new election declined being a candidate.

Before I pass on to other circumstances connected with the career of Dr. Williamson, I beg to be indulged in one or two remarks on the character and influence of his political life. We have seen, that as a representative of the people in the legislature of North Carolina, and in the supreme council of the nation, he was occupied many years. No man, I believe, ever enjoyed in a larger degree the confidence of his constituents, for integrity of conduct; and the influence of his character will be readily appreciated, when we advert to the many important services he effected during the most eventful period of our political history.

He was anxious to prove himself worthy of the high trust reposed in him, nor did he ever permit any private or selfish views to interfere with considerations of public interest. As chairman of numerous committees, as the mover of important resolutions, as the framer of new propositions, and new laws, he devoted the best energies of an active mind, and was

ever prominent in the business of the house. In debate, his elocution was striking, but somewhat peculiar. The graces of oratory did not belong to Dr. Williamson ; yet the known purity of his intentions, his inflexible devotedness to the interests of his country, and the unblemished tenor of his private life, awakened an attention which was well supported by the pertinency of his observations, the soundness of his reasoning, and the information he possessed upon every subject to which he directed his attention.

While in congress, his duties as a legislator were his exclusive study, and this advantage seldom failed of that success which was denied to the lengthened debate and declamation of his opponents.

In his answer to a letter inclosing the thanks of the general assembly of North Carolina, for his long and faithful services, referring to his own conduct, he observes, “ On this repeated testimony of the approbation of my fellow citizens, I cannot promise that I shall be more diligent or more attentive to their interests ; for ever since I have had the honour to serve them in congress, their particular interest, and the honour and prosperity of the nation, have been the sole objects of my care ; *to them I have devoted every hour of my time.*”

Although Dr. Williamson might not captivate by the graces of elocution, he possessed a remarkable quickness in perceiving and comprehending the several bearings of a question ; and if eloquence be correctly defined by Dr. Johnson, "the power of overthrowing an adversary's argument and putting your own in its place," then Dr. Williamson may, indeed, be pronounced an orator ; for in detecting the weak and defenceless points of the adversary's citadel, he discovered no less adroitness, than in the force and strength with which he followed up the combat. He rarely occupied the house with what is called a set speech, but in his desultory observations frequently appeared a knowledge of the principles of legislation, which could only be furnished by a mind enriched by experience, and deeply versed in the history of man. How well his services were appreciated, is evinced by the repeated votes of thanks with which he was honoured by the Legislatures of Pennsylvania and North Carolina. I shall add to their approbation of the public part of Dr. Williamson's character, the opinion of Mr. Jefferson, with which I have been lately favoured : "We served together in congress, at Annapolis, during the winter of 1783 and 4 ; there I found him a very useful member, of an acute mind, attentive to business, and of an high degree of erudition."

In January, 1789, Doctor Williamson was married to Miss Maria Apthorpe, daughter of the late Hon. Charles Ward Apthorpe, formerly a Member of his Majesty's Council, for the province of New-York : by that lady he had two sons : she died when the youngest was but a few days old.

After the loss he had sustained by the death of Mrs. Williamson, he resolved to retire from public employment ; to settle his private affairs ; to prepare for publication his work on Climate, and his more elaborate performance, his History of North Carolina : but the object of attention which lay still nearer his heart, and which especially induced him to withdraw from the very honourable station he had held, was the education of his children : to them he devoted, with great solicitude, a large portion of his time and attention. His eldest son, who died in 1811, in the 22d year of his age, gave evidence of the parental care that had been exercised in the superintendence of his education, and of the success with which it had been conducted. He was a good classical scholar—was well versed in astronomical and philosophical knowledge, and still more remarked for his correct deportment, his benevolence of character, and his sincere piety. He was an Alumnus of Columbia College, and reflected credit upon that institution, which holds

so distinguished a place among the literary establishments of this country.

The younger son, whose constitutional infirmities gave little promise, by his death soon after, filled up the measure of his father's afflictions. Although the doctor was never heard to lament the loss of his children, yet no fortitude of mind that he possessed could prevent him from feeling that in the death of his elder son in particular, he had lost his companion, the staff and solace of his old age. But his mind did not require that repose which his feelings otherwise solicited. From this period, the pursuits of philosophy became the more exclusive objects of his regard.

In 1811, his "Observations on the climate in different parts of America, compared with the climate in corresponding parts of the other Continent," were published, in one volume 8vo. It is in vain to attempt any thing like an analysis of this performance, at this time ; a few remarks, however, on this interesting subject, may not be irrelevant. Actuated by patriotism and the love of truth, Dr. Williamson indignantly exposes the sophistry of those writers who have asserted that America is a country in which the frigid temperature and vice of the climate, prevent the growth and expansion of animal and vege-

table nature, and cause man and beast to degenerate. He altogether discards the notion, that a new or inferior race of men had been created for the American continent. A firm believer in the Mosaic writings, he labours with the learned Bishop of Clogher, to prove the conformity of things to Biblical history. He believes our country, in her rivers, mountains, lakes, and vegetable productions, to be formed on a scale of more magnificence than those of the old world, and thinks that the winters are more temperate on the western than on the eastern coast of North America ; although in some parts of this continent they are colder than in corresponding latitudes of Europe : he maintains a gradual amelioration of our climate. He considers the opinion that the Indian is of a new race, to be altogether untenable ; that every part of America was inhabited when discovered by Columbus, and that North America was settled from Tartary or Japan, and from Norway : that South America was peopled from India.

While he admits the great antiquity of the globe, he, nevertheless, is the advocate of the comparatively recent origin of man : he concludes that the inhabitants of America, in the progress of time, may be expected to give proofs of genius, at least equal to those of the other continent. Mr. Jefferson, many

years since, had successfully refuted the hypotheses of Buffon, with respect to the comparative size and number of animals, and the degeneration which was imputed to animal life in the new world. Dr. Williamson occupies more extensive ground, and, like his illustrious predecessor, armed with truth and philosophy, not only fully vindicates the animal and vegetable productions of this continent, but also the climate of America. The libellous assertions of Buffon, Raynal, Robertson, and a host of inferior writers, are put to nought by the facts and the conclusive reasonings adduced by Dr. Williamson.

In the following year, 1812, appeared his *History of North Carolina*, in two volumes 8vo.

The author commences his undertaking with a short account of the discoveries made in America by adventurers from the different parts of Europe. He next relates the attempts of Sir Walter Raleigh to settle a colony in North Carolina, and from that time the history of that colony is continued down to the beginning of the American Revolution ; the work closes with a view of the soil, produce, and general state of health in different parts of that country. In the proofs and explanations annexed to each volume, are inserted many valuable documents, selected with

care, illustrative of matters contained in the body of the text.

The materials of this work were derived chiefly from original sources, and, consequently, great dependence may be placed on them for their correctness. These materials too are the more to be valued, because little information could be obtained from any accounts of North Carolina, previously published. "Hackluyt, Purchas, and other early writers," says Dr. Williamson, in his preface, "have been sufficiently minute in describing the first discoveries, and the attempts that were made to form settlements on different parts of the continent; but no writer has treated with any attention of the progress of colonization, or the civil history of North Carolina, from the time in which the first permanent settlements were formed in that country, Wynn, Oldmixon, and others, who wrote of Carolina, have done little more than name the northern province; their attention was chiefly engaged by South Carolina." "My information," he continues, "has chiefly been taken from public records, and from letter-books or other manuscripts in the possession of ancient families."

In the general arrangement of his materials we find nothing to censure, and much to commend.

The want of dates will occasionally be felt, as their more frequent occurrence must have been attended with additional advantage. In the selection of his matter, the doctor has, with much propriety, enlarged upon circumstances of importance, without occupying the time of the reader with those which are of a trifling nature.

North Carolina is remarkable in affording, among many other memorable events, a more constant succession of grievances than fell to the lot of any other colony, and it presents throughout abundant room for philosophical inquiry and reflection. "I have confined myself," says the doctor, "to this part of the history, although it was the less pleasing task."

The information contained in this work is communicated in a style remarkable for its uniform perspicuity and vigour. The narrative throughout affords numerous indications of more than ordinary penetration into the springs of human action. The author's reflections are the result of a ready and acute mode of thinking, divested of undue bias, and replete with good sense and salutary advice.

He who studies our colonial history, with the writings of Stith, Beverly, Colden, Belknap, Williams,

Trumbull, Sullivan, Minot, and M'Call, must include the North Carolina of Dr. Williamson.*

There are other writings by the same author, of a minor nature, which merit notice. He was at no time an indifferent spectator of passing events, and even after he had actually withdrawn from public life, was repeatedly engaged, exclusively of his works on Climate and on North Carolina, in various publications relating to natural history, medicine, and other branches of a philosophical character. In 1797 Dr. Williamson wrote a short but important paper† on the fevers of North Carolina, as they had prevailed in 1792, in Martin County, near the river Roanoke, and as they had appeared in 1794, upon the river Neus, pointing out the treatment that had been found most successful, and the fatal effects of blood letting in fevers of that type: these remarks were afterwards extended, and compose a chapter in his History of North Carolina,‡ highly interesting both to the pupil and practitioner of medicine.

In the American Museum, by Mathew Carey, he published several fugitive pieces on languages and politics.

* See Reviews of Dr. Williamson's work on Climate, and the History of North Carolina, in the American Medical and Philosophical Register, vol. 3.

† See Medical Repository, vol. 2. p. 156.

‡ See vol. 2.

In his communication on the Fascination of Serpents, published in the Medical Repository,* he offers some new and ingenious opinions on that still inexplicable phenomenon in natural history.

Upon the appearance of the yellow fever in New-York, in 1805, Dr. Williamson was appointed by the Corporation of the city, one of a Medical Committee to investigate the particular character and origin of the cases that occurred at the commencement of the pestilence of that season. From all that the Doctor had previously seen, as well as the facts that now fell under his view, he was led to the belief, with the other members of that committee, that the yellow fever is a disease *sui generis*, and consequently of a nature altogether different from the bilious remittent fever of this country.

He enriched the American Medical and Philosophical Register, with several valuable papers. The first entitled, "Remarks upon the incorrect manner in which Iron Rods are sometimes set up for defending Houses from Lightning," &c. conveys some important practical instruction upon that subject.† His other papers were "Conjectures respecting the Na-

* Vol. 10, p. 341, &c.

† Vol. 1.

tive Climate of Pestilence ;” “Observations on Navigable Canals ;” “Observations on the means of preserving the Commerce of New-York,” and “Additional Observations on Navigable Canals ;” all printed in the same periodical journal, under the signatures of *Observer*, or *Mercator*. Doctor Williamson was among the first of our citizens who entertained correct views as to the practicability of forming a canal to connect the waters of Lake Erie with the Hudson River ; and the importance of this great work so engaged his feelings, that besides the papers already mentioned, on Canal Navigation, he published a series on the same subject, under the title of *Atticus*. These papers were so well received, that many thousand copies have been circulated through the medium of newspapers, and the pamphlet itself has been several times reprinted.

In the year 1810, Dr. Williamson was appointed by the New-York Historical Society, to deliver the anniversary discourse, commemorative of the objects of that Institution : he readily complied with their request, and upon that occasion selected for his subject, “the benefits of Civil History.” That discourse is evidently the result of much reading and reflection.

Having noticed the general neglect among ancient

nations, to preserve authentic records of their events, and the consequent uncertainty and incorrectness with which the occurrences of former times are related, even by the best ancient writers, the author dwells upon the pleasure and advantages which arise from the study of civil history, and points out its importance as a means of promoting human happiness.

In 1814, associated with the present governor* of this state, and some other gentlemen friendly to the interests of science, and desirous to promote the literary reputation of the state of New-York, Dr. Williamson took a very active part in the formation and establishment of the Literary and Philosophical Society of this city ; and contributed to its advancement by the publication of a valuable paper in the first volume of its transactions.

As a Trustee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, of the University of the State of New-York, he not only performed its duties with vigilance and impartiality, but contributed to its interests by a liberal pecuniary appropriation.

Some other institutions of this city were also aided by similar acts of his beneficence, especially the Orphan Asylum, and the Society for the relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. To these his donations were such as his moderate fortune enabled him to be-

* His Excellency, De Witt Clinton.

stow, consistently with his obligations to his family connexions; to whom, with the exception of a few inconsiderable legacies, he has left the residue of his estate.

The Humane Society, the City Dispensary, and the New-York Hospital, received a large portion of his time and attention during the remaining years of his life. In the last mentioned establishment, the punctuality and ability with which he performed the numerous duties assigned him, were subjects of great surprize to his associate junior members.

His quickness of perception—his memory—his judgment, and his external senses, all manifested an uncommon activity to the very last days of his life. This exemption from the ordinary defects and privations attendant upon old age, is doubtless ascribable to his temperate and regular habits of living; the order and method with which he performed all his various duties; and especially to that rigid abstinence from all vinous and spiritous drinks, to which system of living he had so peculiarly adhered from his earliest days. For of him it may be truly said,

“ In his youth he never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in his blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead, woo
The means of weakness and debility;
Therefore his age was as a lusty winter,
Frostly but kindly.

As You Like it—Act 2.

The life of this excellent man was now drawing to its close. Hitherto, by means of the uniform temperance and regularity of his habits, he had, with very few exceptions, been protected from any return of those pulmonary complaints with which he had been affected in his youth. His intellectual faculties remained to the last period of his life unbroken, and in their full vigour.

It is somewhere said, that to an active and well disciplined mind, a chair in a library is the throne of human felicity. No man enjoyed the luxury of literary pursuits more than Dr. Williamson. These, with the society of his particular friends, added to the consolations afforded by religion, and the recollection of a life passed in the performance of duty, and devoted to the benefit of his fellow men, gilded the evening of his days, and rendered them no less cheerful and serene than had been the morning and meridian of his long and useful career.

For some time, however, after the death of his favourite son, his strength and spirits were observed to decline. In two or three years his ancles began to swell, attended with other symptoms denoting the approach of general dropsy. Although he had recourse to the Ballston chalybeate, by the middle of April, 1816, the swelling of the limbs and symptoms of a

dropsical affection of the chest had so far increased, that for several weeks he could not lie in a horizontal posture, but was compelled to sleep sitting in his chair: by the use, however, of powerful diuretics, succeeded by tonic medicines and daily exercise, his complaints in a few months were chiefly removed, and he was restored to his usual pursuits, and his wonted cheerfulness, which were continued to the day of his decease.

This event took place on the 22d day of May last, in the 85th year of his age, and in the sudden manner he himself had anticipated. While taking his accustomed ride a short distance from the city, accompanied by his favourite niece,* to whom he was tenderly attached, the heat of the day being unusually great, he suddenly sunk into a deliquium. Medical assistance was immediately called, but too late: his spirit had fled to him who gave it.

It remains for me to detain you while I offer a few observations illustrative of such parts of Dr. Williamson's character as are not embraced in the details that have already occupied our attention.

To those who have not enjoyed a personal acquaintance with him, I may remark, that he was no

* Mrs. Hamilton, the wife of John A. Hamilton, Esq.

less distinguished for the manliness of his form, than for the energy and firmness of his mind. Dr. Williamson, in his person, was tall, considerably above the general standard, of a large frame, well proportioned, but of a thin habit of body. He was remarkable for his erect, dignified carriage, which he retained even in the decline of life. His whole physiognomy was peculiar and striking. The proportion of his head to his person was good, and its configuration capacious and well formed. The features of his face were strongly marked, and indicated bold and original thinking. His forehead was high, open, and boldly arched. His cheek-bones were elevated, exhibiting the characteristic of his Scottish ancestors. His eyes were of a dark gray colour ; in their expression, penetrating and steady. His nose was long and aquiline. His mouth exhibited an unusual depression, which in advanced life was greatly increased by the loss of his teeth. His chin was long and remarkably prominent. These peculiarities diminished the beauty of a head, which, with those exceptions, was one of nature's finest models. Altogether, his form was one of those which cannot pass unnoticed ; and if, in early life, he had sacrificed a little to the graces, his ap-

pearance would have been eminently attractive, as well as commanding.

The portrait in your presence,* painted by an artist† whose works reflect lustre upon our country, and whose name is honoured by every production of his pencil, exhibits a faithful likeness of the original.

In his conversation, Dr. Williamson was pleasant, facetious, and animated; occasionally indulging in wit and satire; always remarkable for the strength of his expressions, and an emphatic manner of utterance, accompanied with a peculiarity of gesticulation, originally in part ascribable to the impulse of an active mind, but which early in life had become an established habit.

As was to be expected from the education of Dr. Williamson, and from his long and extensive intercourse with the world, his manners, though in some respects eccentric, were generally those of a polite, well bred gentleman. Occasionally, however, when

* The original portrait of Dr. Williamson, in the possession of the author of this memoir, was suspended in the College Hall, at the time this Discourse was pronounced.

† Col. John Trumbull.

he met with persons who either displayed great ignorance, want of moral character, or a disregard to religious truth, he expressed his feelings and opinions in such manner, as distinctly to show them they possessed no claim to his respect. To such, both his language and manner might be considered as abrupt, if not possessing a degree of what might be denominated Johnsonian rudeness.

His style, both in conversation and in writing, was simple, concise, perspicuous, and remarkable for its strength ; always displaying correctness of thought, and logical precision. In the order too and disposal of his discourse, whether oral or written, such was the close connexion of its parts, and the dependence of one proposition upon that which preceded it, that it became easy to discern the influence of his early predilection for mathematical investigation. The same habit of analysis, arising from “ the purifying influence of geometrical demonstration,” led him to avoid that profusion of language, with which it has become customary with some writers to dilute their thoughts : in like manner, he carefully abstained from that embroidery of words which a modern and vitiated taste has rendered too prevalent.

Under the impressions and precepts he had very early received, no circumstances could ever induce

him to depart from that line of conduct which his understanding had informed him was correct. His constancy of character, the obstinacy I may say of his integrity, whether in the minor concerns of private life, or in the performance of his public duties, became proverbial with all who knew him. Nothing could ever induce him

“ To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind.”

As an illustration of his characteristic integrity, allow me to add, from the information of one of his friends, that when in congress, in 1791, it became his duty to vote upon the law passed in that year, imposing an excise on domestic distilled spirits, the celebrated *whiskey law*, as it was called, which gave rise to the western insurrection. In the debates on that subject, he took an active interest, and although he well knew that he was counteracting the sentiments of his constituents, he appeared the decided friend and advocate of that law. On the day of its passing, and while the people were going from the hall, Dr. Williamson overtook a friend, from whom I received this anecdote: the Doctor joined him, informed him of the passage of the bill, and added in his usual sententious manner, “ Sir, my vote was in its favour ; I have discharged my duty to my con-

science, but I have lost my popularity. I shall never again be elected to congress:" but that gave him no uneasiness: believing it to be a right measure, he had voted as his conscience and his best judgment dictated, and as he observed, "he was not without the hope that one of its effects would be to lessen the use of a poison which was destructive of the morals and health of a numerous class of the people."* I beg leave to add another evidence, which fell under my own notice, of that rigid adherence to moral rectitude which ever marked his character.

A few years since, a gentleman of this city desirous of borrowing a sum of money, made an application to Doctor Williamson for that purpose: the Doctor promised to supply him; but upon the day when the transaction was to be completed, the gentleman not knowing that the Doctor's verbal promise and his written bond were of the same validity, and apprehending that something might occur to prevent the Doctor from complying with his engagement, offered him a larger interest than that recognized by law. The Doctor, offended by this insult to his integrity, at once declined further communication

* See Remarks by Dr. Williamson, on the increasing consumption of Spiritous Liquors in the United States, and the evil they produce to society *History of North Carolina*, vol. 2.

with the party concerned, and refused the loan he otherwise had been prepared to make.

Upon another more important occasion, he manifested somewhat similar feelings in rejecting a powerful appeal to his pride, and, I may add, to his reputation.

Joseph Ceracchi, an Italian statuary of great celebrity in his profession, finding the turbulent state of Europe unfavourable to the exercise of his art, had come to this country. This gentleman exercised his talents in erecting honorary memorials of some of our most distinguished public men. The busts of Washington, President Adams, Gov. Jay, Gen. Hamilton, Gov. George Clinton, and Col. John Trumbull, are eminent examples of his art.

He, at that time also, as appears by a correspondence in my possession, applied to Dr. Williamson, then a member of congress, for permission to perpetuate in marble, the bust of the *American Cato*, as Mr. Ceracchi was pleased to denominate him.—I beg leave to read the originals :

“ Mr. Ceracchi requests the favour of Mr. Williamson to sit for his bust, not on account of getting Mr. Williamson’s influence in favour of the National Monument ; this is a subject too worthy to be recom-

mended ; but merely on account of his distinguished character, that will produce honour to the artist, and may give to posterity the expressive features of the American Cato.”—To this note Dr. Williamson, replied in his appropriate caustic style :

“ Mr. Hugh Williamson is much obliged to Mr. Ceracchi for the polite offer of taking his bust. Mr. Williamson could not possibly suppose that Mr. Ceracchi had offered such a compliment by way of a bribe ; for the man in his public station who could accept of a bribe, or betray his trust, ought never to have his likeness made, except from a block of *wood*.

“ Mr. Williamson, in the mean time, cannot avail himself of Mr. Ceracchi’s services, as he believes that posterity will not be solicitous to know what were the features of his face. He hopes, nevertheless, for the sake of his children, that posterity will do him the justice to believe, that his conduct was upright, and that he was uniformly influenced by a regard to the happiness of his fellow citizens, and those who shall come after them.

“ *Philadelphia, 11th April, 1792.*”

To those who knew his unbending resolution when once formed, it need not be added, that Dr.

Williamson, offended by this flattery, persisted in his determination not to sit to Mr. Ceracchi.

The steadiness of his private attachments ought not to be passed over in silence. Dr. Williamson was slow in forming his friendship, but when formed, as the writer of this memorial of his worth can testify, it was immoveable, and not to be changed by time or distance.

Whatever may be the merits of Dr. Williamson, as a scholar, a physician, a statesman, or philosopher; however he may be distinguished for his integrity, his benevolence, and those virtues which enter into the moral character of man; he presents to the world claims of a still higher order. The lovers of truth and virtue will admire much more than his literary endowments, that regard for religious duty, of which, under all circumstances and in all situations, he exhibited so eminent an example.

There are some philosophers, and of great attainments too in their particular departments of knowledge, whose views are so rivetted to, I had almost said identified with, the objects of their research, that they cannot extend their vision beyond the little spot of earth which they inhabit; they are, indeed, with great felicity of expression, designated by the

appropriate name of *Materialists*. Dr. Williamson was not an associate of this class—with all his inquiries into the physical constitution of this globe, like Newton and Rittenhouse, he could elevate his views to the great agent that gave existence to our world, and sustains it in its connexions with the other parts of the universe. With all the attention he bestowed upon the various departments of nature, he still, in the true spirit of a lover of wisdom, could direct his thoughts to

“————— Sion Hill,
And Siloa's brook, that flow'd
Fast by the oracle of God.”

'To those who delight to dwell on themes like these, it will be gratifying to receive the expression of his own sentiments and feelings on this momentous subject. In a letter I possess, written during his last illness, while it displays the full possession of his mental faculties, and manifests the consciousness of his approaching dissolution, and his patient resignation to that event; he observes, “I have not any apprehension of a long confinement by sickness; men of my habits usually drop off quickly, therefore I count it my duty to be constantly in a state of preparation, whether I may be called off in the morning, at noon, or at midnight.”

Upon another occasion, a short time before his decease, he thus concludes a letter to his nephew, and which, I believe, proved one of his last communications.

“ I have, as I believe, given you notice of every thing to which it is proper that you should attend ; and having now, as I think, nearly finished my course through the wilderness of life, grant, O Lord ! that when my feet shall touch the cold stream of the waters of Jordan, my eyes may be steadily fixed on the heavenly Canaan, so that I may say to death, ‘ where is thy sting ? ’ ”

Such was the man whose character and services we have this day endeavoured to commemorate.

CITIZENS OF AMERICA,

If piety, patriotism, talents, and learning, and these all devoted to his country’s good and the best interests of mankind, entitled their possessor to praise and gratitude, you will cherish with respect the memory of Hugh Williamson, whose name will be associated with those to whom we are most indebted for our country’s independence, and the successful administration of that happy constitution of government which we now enjoy.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN,

You who are now engaged in the pursuits of science as preparatory to the exercise of a liberal profession, will also learn, from the example that has been exhibited, to set a due value upon the diligent and profitable employment of your time, to dedicate your talents and services to your country's welfare; and above all, to cherish that love of truth, virtue, and religion, for which the venerable subject of this imperfect eulogy was so eminently distinguished.

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